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From: Rasmussen, Sara
Sent: Mon 8/10/2015 5:11:51 PM
Subject: CNN story on weekend mine waste spill - "EPA Spill: the magnitude of it you can't even describe it"

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/09/us/colorado-epa-mine-river-spill/index.html>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/08/09/navajo-nation-epa-spill/31384515/>

<http://mashable.com/2015/08/10/colorado-mine-waste-spill/>

Hi –

Above are links to news articles – I know you are traveling today, so I copied part of the CNN story here [below]. The gist of the articles is that an EPA team inadvertently released an estimated 3 million gallons (updated by EPA since the CNN article) of waste water (heavy metals) from an abandoned mine which flowed into a nearby river. According to open article “the discolored water from the spill stretched more than 100 miles from where it originated.”

It is not clear by the summary articles what actually occurred for this error to happen.

But I thought I’d take this opportunity to remind you of how valuable a tool an interactive GIS map of waste sites can be.

A GIS map – that portrays location of well heads, SWMUs, and other key times identified – which can be taken out in the field - functions off a portable device such as a smart phone and ipad - can be an extremely helpful for inspectors and others working at a facility.

As you remember, at the BC meeting last week, Paul G of Region 3 talked about preparing and having inspectors take/use GIS maps during inspections. The map shows location of units, wells, so that inspectors know where specific items are. They are using this in Region 3 at some sites. Joel Hennessy of Region 3 is the expert on mapping.

Here are two pics from the recent R3 PPT

- 1) shows the GIS map of a site with the location of various items on the site,
- 2) shows a portion of the map being displayed on a smart phone. It shows “well” dead center, which would be correct as the phone is sitting on the well.

As you can imagine such technology is a valuable tool for inspections, both for currently operating facilities, and for Long-Term Stewardship oversight in the future





(CNN)The city of Durango and La Plata County, Colorado, have declared a state of emergency after a federal cleanup crew accidentally released mine waste into the water.

An estimated 1 million gallons of waste water spilled out of an abandoned mine area in the southern part of the state last week, turning the Animas River orange and prompting the Environmental Protection Agency to tell locals to avoid it.

"This action has been taken due to the serious nature of the incident and to convey the grave concerns that local elected officials have to ensure that all appropriate levels of state and federal resources are brought to bear to assist our community not only in actively managing this tragic incident but also to recover from it," said La Plata County Manager Joe Kerby.

According to the EPA, the spill occurred when one of its teams was using heavy equipment to enter the Gold King Mine, a suspended mine near Durango. Instead of entering the mine and beginning the process of pumping and treating the contaminated water inside as planned, the team accidentally caused it to flow into the nearby Animas River. Before the spill, water carrying "metals pollution" was flowing into a holding area outside the mine.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials have been watching for any effects on wildlife since the incident began on Wednesday. They are optimistic that the effects of the spill on terrestrial wildlife will be minimal, the EPA said. Fish are more sensitive to changes in water.

Officials said they believe the spill carried heavy metals, mainly iron, zinc and copper, from the mine into a creek that feeds into the Animas River. From there, the orange water plugged steadily along through the small stretch of winding river in southern Colorado and across the state border to New Mexico where the Animas meets the San Juan River.

New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez was in Farmington over the weekend to tour the damage.

"The magnitude of it, you can't even describe it," she said, CNN affiliate KRQE reported. "It's like when I flew over the fires, your mind sees something it's not ready or adjusted to see."

The affiliate spoke to Rosemary Hart, who lives on the Animas River. Her family reportedly depends on a well to get water, and the spill has made the water unusable.

"We came out here together, and we looked at the river and we cried," Hart told KRQE.

The EPA and the New Mexico Environment Department said they will test private domestic wells near the Animas to identify metals of concern from the spill.

Tests on public drinking water systems are conducted separately by the state environment department, the agencies said.

CNN's Eli Watkins, Jackie Castillo, Jethro Mullen and Joe Sutton contributed to this report

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"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act, but a habit."

- Aristotle